



# Cherry Creek Basin, Colorado Stewardship and Smart Growth



Cherry Creek

## The Setting

The Cherry Creek Watershed extends 50 miles to the southeast from its junction with the South Platte River in downtown Denver. Douglas County, in the center of the watershed, was the Nation's fastest growing county in the 90's. Cherry Creek State Park is the State's most used state park, but the surrounding and upstream areas have very rapidly urbanized. Cherry Creek Reservoir is the Park focal point with fishing, boating, and swimming uses. Water quality in the reservoir has been seriously degraded from nutrient and sediment impacts due to population growth, and has received much media attention. Portions of the creek's wildlife habitat in Denver have been seriously degraded, with additional concerns in Arapahoe County due to future growth. Concerns exist among all users, with ramifications including State Legislature reconstitution of the Basin Water Quality Authority and involvement from the Governor's Office.

## Recent Highlights and Activities

- EPA has lead role in assisting local stakeholders to create *Cherry Creek Stewardship Partners*.
- *Partners* has received active participation from all three Denver Metro counties, and many others, with a rapidly expanding basin-wide coordination and education role.
- *Partners* has sponsored three Cherry Creek conferences and is planning a 4<sup>th</sup>. Conferences have grown in breadth, interest, and quality.



Wetlands Along Cherry Creek

(Recent highlights continued)

- *Smart Growth for Clean Water Project* is a national pilot effort to demonstrate how voluntary land conservation can improve water quality.
  - ⇒ Contaminant sources largely non-point with growth threatening riparian areas.
  - ⇒ Locally managed effort with National (EPA, CDPHE, NALGEP, TPL, ERG) support.
  - ⇒ Three Metro Counties have received State funds to work together on a riparian land preservation strategy.
  - ⇒ Trust for Public Land leading effort (supported by State Lottery funds) to identify riparian lands for protection.
  - ⇒ Develop approach to quantify water quality benefits of preserving specific parcels of land.
  - ⇒ Funding strategy to include multi objective sources including CWA SRF, and 319, brownfields and many others including local, state, federal; land, water quality, drainage, recreation, wildlife.
- Phased TMDL established April 2001 following EPA-facilitated stakeholder process.
  - ⇒ Water quality standard for chlorophyll *a* and phosphorus revised in 2000.
  - ⇒ Phase II Stormwater regulation incorporated into State control regulation.
  - ⇒ Water quality monitoring and modeling also incorporated.
  - ⇒ Understanding ground-water hydrology essential to support TMDL.

### EPA Region 8's Ongoing Efforts

- Continued leadership on Cherry Creek Stewardship Partners and financial support to Partners and Conference; "traditional" opening conference speaker
- Leadership in Smart Growth for Clean Water project: overall project co-chair, co-chair of Funding Strategy sub-committee, leadership on land conservation and water-quality benefits efforts.



Castlewood Canyon in the Upper Cherry Creek Basin

For more information about EPA Region's activities in the Cherry Creek Basin, please contact Marc Alston at 303-312-6356 or email at [alston.marc@epa.gov](mailto:alston.marc@epa.gov)